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SUBJECT: DRC ELECTION DAY: SITREP 1, 10/29 1000

¶1. Senior representatives from the Kabila and Bemba camps issued a joint appeal October 28 requesting their followers to vote with "the same calm, order and serenity" as they did in the first round. A copy of the statement has been transmitted to AF/C and S/ES-O. An unofficial translation of part of the text follows:

"Our great and beautiful country, which has suffered too long from arbitrariness and violence, deserves to choose once and for all the path of peace and democracy. The whole world will be watching us Sunday. Let us show it the face of maturity and responsibility while facing our destiny. We do this together on this day, a unique, historic and memorable day. In achieving this essential stage in our democratic transition, we can leave behind the sad past and turn resolutely towards the future, for the good of our country."

¶2. Voting in the presidential runoff and provincial assembly races started throughout the DRC on October 29 without any major reported problems or incidents. Polls opened officially at 0600 local time nationwide. Here in Kinshasa, steady rain delayed the opening of voting centers by 60-90 minutes and slowed the process in some areas. However, some voters were reported making their way through flooded roads, often carrying their shoes and rolling their pants up to wade through knee-deep water. More voters are expected make their way to the polls following the end of Sunday church services.

¶3. Most cities around the country -- including Goma, Bukavu, Mbuji-Mayi, Bunia, Uvira, and Kisangani -- report fair weather and reasonable-to-high turnout. Other urban centers, including Kikwit, Lubumbashi and Gemena report lower numbers of early voters than during the first round.

¶4. Consensus among observers in Kinshasa is that the voting centers appear well organized, and that the voting process is much simpler and more rapid than the July 30 first round. The provincial assembly ballots are long and complex in some districts, but the two-candidate presidential ballot is much shorter. The lower early-morning turnout here is also a factor.

¶5. Observers and party witnesses are present in numbers. In some Kinshasa centers, there are too many party witnesses to fit in the rooms; they are being required to rotate. One mission observer reported that a voting center president delayed opening because no party witnesses had arrived, fearing that if he allowed voters to enter, party witnesses would later accuse him of stuffing the ballot box. We reported the problem to the Independent Electoral Institute (CEI), which contacted the voting center. The center subsequently opened, and no others incidents of this kind have been reported.

¶6. In Lubumbashi, international observers reported that Vice President Bemba's MLC was having difficulties getting all of its witnesses in place, and had requested special permission from the CEI to use accredited substitutes. MONUC reports that CEI President Apollinaire Malu Malu approved the request.
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